

Education of environmental consciousness as an educational goal of the partnership between national park and new secondary school. Results of a qualitative evaluation study



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Abstract

The subject matter of the research is a project conducted by the national park 'Nationalpark Hohe Tauern' and the Neue Mittelschule (new secondary school) Matrei in Osttirol which is the national park's partner school. In 2005 both the principal of the Neue Mittelschule (new secondary school) Matrei in Osttirol and the director of the national park agreed to establish a main emphasis on the national park as part of the curriculum of the Neue Mittelschule (new secondary school) Matrei in Osttirol. Together with the director of the national park 'Nationalpark Hohe Tauern' and the principal of the partner school the author agreed to investigate the benefits of the national park's programme for the students in a research project. The children are supposed to become ambassadors of the national park and in addition there need to be re-examinations whether or not the educational objective can be reached through the programme. The results of this project can be used for purposes of empowerment evaluation as an input for further development of the concept.

Keywords

national park, new secondary school, empowerment evaluation, method triangulation, participant observation, interviews, group discussions, vignettes, environmental consciousness, education, nature, identification

Methods

The research work is ethnographic and is structured multi methodically. The participant observation covers a part of the methods and gives information about the habitat of the students, the national park rangers, the teachers and parents. The researcher accompanied the third year classes with their park activities for one school year. As the Grounded Theory is speaking of a circular process, another survey took place one year after the specific elicitation of data in the field which was meant for taking a closer look once again and for watching a schools class whilst performing an activity one more time. Additionally to the participant observation the point of view of all the actors, in this case the students of the third grade has been gathered through group discussions. The empiric foundations are formed by a method triangulation where additional data has been collected by conducting expert interviews with national park rangers, teachers and one representative of the PTO. The data has been assessed through content analysis (cf. MAYRING, 2015). The conversations have taken place after the first field period. Selected vignettes and extracts of an observatory protocol have been the results of the participant observation in the field.

The analytical framework is formed by approaches to environmental awareness theories, if the following is about environmental awareness the author refers to the tradition of the multi-component model, which has been established by MALONEY & WARD (1973). 'They have tried to capture environmental consciousness on a scale that consists of four subscales (a scale of knowledge, a scale of affect and one scale each for the recording of verbal and actual readiness to act).' (HOMBURG & MATTHIES 1998, p. 50, author's translation).

There is agreement that environmental consciousness is a multidimensional construct, which is integrated in contextual conditions and substantially consists of the components environmental knowledge, the environmental experience and involvement or perception of environment, value orientations, behavioural intentions as well as the environmental act (cf. SPADA 1996; BOLSCO & SEYBOLD 1996; de HAAN & KUCKARTZ 1996 cited in: HAUENSCHILD 2002, p. 86). As environmental consciousness depicts an abstract construct the author tries an approach through the terms environmental sensitivity and mindfulness with nature.

Education is to be understood as the personality development and development of individuality according to Wilhelm von Humboldt.

'The Humboldtsche idea of education is firstly not about the accumulation of empiric (fact based) knowledge, but rather again about the development and perfection of the personality and the obtainment of individuality. The so called 'Sich-Bilden' is not conducted to reach a material goal but rather for oneself, it is an end in itself and serves in the end none other than the incarnation of the human being' (LEDERER 2014, p. 52f., author's translation).

The author follows the explanations of GERNOT BÖHME (2002) when using the term nature. Nature in that comprehension is inner as well as external nature that surrounds us. Therefore on the one hand nature is being associated with landscape, meaning with something that occurs outside, however nature also includes people at the same time.

Results

After a clarification of the most important theoretical terms, the author begins the empirical part with the data acquisition in the research field. The results of the study can be distinguished into three categories. During the first step the question has been settled what the main natural concepts are that have been passed on through the educational programme. It has been determined that the natural concepts primarily include 'hands-on training on the scene' followed by the 'approach to learn', 'nature as an experience', the 'use of natural resources' and 'conservation about nature'.

There have been empirical analysis in a second discussion whether or not the students have been influenced in relation to their ecological consciousness. The deductive application of categories by Mayring (cf. MAYRING 2015, p. 97ff.) has been brought in to answer this research assignment. Altogether the group 'Mauerläufer' and the group 'Wintergoldhähnchen' have given 23 statements that indicate high environmental consciousness, 17 statements evoked an average environmental consciousness and no statements that have shown a weak environmental consciousness. Whether the overall positive result has been evoked through the educational programme or whether other undetermined factors are decisively responsible for the students of the Neue Mittelschule (new secondary school) Matri in Osttirol showing average or high environmental consciousness, thus effects and process related changes have to be clarified in the following work.

The researcher has tried to answer the question whether the students identify themselves with the national park during the third step. After all the main emphasis of the educational programme is for the students to become ambassadors of the national park. Identification in terms of a psychological comprehension is described as a process that includes imitation and emulation of a person to whom there is a strong emotional bond (cf. SCHAUB & ZENKE 2000). In the available case the relationship to a person is being expanded to the bond to an institution. Surveys in the field as well as conversations indicate in many ways that the students show a strong reference to their living space which leads further to the conclusion that a high identification with the national park is given.

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